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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000604

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: ASSEMBLY AGAIN FOCUSES ON RULING FAMILY

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and d

#### Summary

1.(C) Efforts to curtail the authority of the ruling family continue to eclipse identifying national priorities and setting a legislative agenda for the National Assembly. A special session on Tuesday called to discuss the Amiri-decreed financial stimulus bill and conclude debate over the Amir's address to the opening sitting of the legislature deteriorated into an acrimonious debate over the influence of DPM Shaykh Ahmad al-Fahd Al-Sabah, who was not even in attendance at the session. Meanwhile, Interior Minister Shaykh Jaber al-Khalid Al-Sabah appears ready to be grilled by MP Musallam al-Barrak on June 23 at the Assembly's next meeting. The controversy surrounding the two shaykhs highlights the tension between PM Shaykh Nasser al-Mohammad Al-Sabah's need lead a "stronger" government and his need to co-opt the fractious and competing constituencies within both the Assembly and the ruling family. End Summary.

#### Ahmad al-Fahd, MIA, Becomes A Target

2.(U) Without legislation to discuss, the Assembly's Tuesday session deteriorated into a heated debate over the inclusion of DPM Shaykh Ahmad al-Fahd Al-Sabah in the cabinet. The sitting was originally called to debate the financial rescue package enacted by fiat while the Assembly was dissolved, but the committee charged with reviewing the bill was not able to conclude discussion and has proposed the decree be revisited in October after the parliament's summer break. In lieu of the bill, the Assembly attempted to complete debate on the Amir's letter to MPs which was read at the May 31 opening session. Instead of responding to the contents of the letter, MP Adel Al-Sarawi opened debate by criticizing the appointment of DPM for Economic Affairs and Minister of State for Development and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Shaykh Ahmad al-Fahd. Al-Sarawi asked rhetorically why a man who admitted he was removed (as Minister of Energy in 2006) by the will of the people was reappointed to the government. Pro-government MPs Khalaf Dmaither Al-Enezi, Mubarak Al-Khrainij and Saadoun Hammad Al-Otaibi forcefully countered the critique of the DPM, who was not in attendance at the session to defend himself.

#### Jabir al-Khalid Ready and Willing to Face a Grilling

3.(U) Putting grit to the government's newly forged image of "strength", Minister of Interior Shaykh Jaber al-Khalid Al-Sabah announced this week that he will face the grilling filed by MP Musallam al-Barrak. Jaber al-Khalid, according to local press, has prepared for the spectacle by rehearsing with advisers much like American politicians would prepare

for a debate. His planned defense was approved by the cabinet on Sunday and on Monday he moved to moot what was considered the strongest allegation -- misuse of public funds relating to the procurement of campaign billboards during the Assembly campaign -- by referring the file to the public prosecution. Jaber al-Khalid is also accused of installing closed circuit cameras outside the Assembly to spy on MPs and refusing to arrest an Assembly candidate accused of attempting to buy votes.

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Comment  
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4.(C) Ahmad al-Fahd probably was included in the cabinet to prevent him from working against his rival, PM Nasser al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, and not because of his expertise in development. While his inclusion may temporarily mend some fences within the Al-Sabah, the DPM, by virtue of his ambition and past involvement in questionable financial transactions, may create more problems than he solves. Ahmad al-Fahd continues to cultivate a popular support base, especially among Kuwait's tribes. His control of the Development and Housing Ministries gives him great power to reward or punish his political supporters and opponents. While acknowledging they perceive him as corrupt and likely to take a ten percent cut of any projects he oversees, businessmen PolOff has spoken to recently almost universally are willing to accept that level of corruption in exchange for some movement in Kuwait's stifling bureaucracy. MP Sar'awi's attack on the DPM probably mostly functions as a warning that Ahmad al-Fahd can expect to have his actions

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closely scrutinized, regardless of his ability to get projects moving.

5.(C) It is remarkable that the ruling family would accept the risk posed by Jaber al-Khalid submitting to a grilling. He will be the most senior Al-Sabah ever grilled and probably is the first Minister of Interior ever in the Arab world to be called to task by his constituents. The government probably has enough votes to survive the grilling and a potential vote of no confidence that may follow, but it is unclear what doors will be opened regardless of how well the Minister performs. Public perception is that the Amir has ordered the Minister to face the grilling; the Amir made public comments on Monday affirming the right of MPs to grill ministers. MP Musallam al-Barrak has a reputation for ensuring he has solid evidence to back up any accusations he has made. He is also a skilled orator who specializes in baiting his opponents. Jaber al-Khalid, a former Chief of Staff of the Kuwaiti Army accustomed to having his orders implemented without question, may be particularly vulnerable to al-Barrak's antics.

6.(C) Tuesday's grilling probably will conclude the political season as Kuwaitis are anxious to escape the heat and start their summer holidays. If Jabir al-Khalid performs well during his interpellation, Nasser al-Mohammad likely will retreat to his Geneva summer home with peace of mind, knowing that he is no longer the prime target of disgruntled MPs and that he has fulfilled the Amir's desire that his government lead with a stronger hand.

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